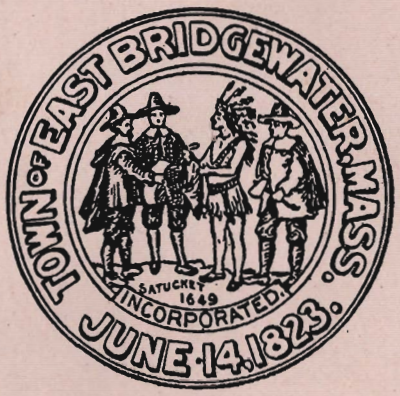
Historical Facts Relative to

East Bridgewater, Mass.

1630 —— 1930



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Massachusetts Bay Tercentenary Celebration

An Epitome of the History

of the

Town of East Bridgewater

Prepared by the

Historical Program Committee for the

Tercentenary Celebration

September 20, 1930

Forsam et Haec Olim Meminisse Juvabit

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REFERENCES

The facts contained in this Publication were obtained from the following authorities:

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Historical Collections Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Massachusetts. 1840. By John Warner Barber.

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Epitaphs in Old Bridgewater, Massachusetts. 1882. By Williams Latham.

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Abridged Items of Historical Interest.

THE Town of East Bridgewater is located in Eastern Massachusetts, about twenty-five miles South of Boston and eighteen miles from the old town of Plymouth. It contains within its borders many places of rare historic value. Its records are replete with incidents of exceptional interest to us of a later generation.

It is recorded that in 1645, certain inhabitants of Duxbury were granted the right to purchase a portion of land which was then known as Saughtuckett.

This name Saughtuckett (or Satucket) signified "a place where rivers meet."

The Grant was considered by the Court as pre-emptive merely, and as little more than an authority or right to purchase this territory of the natives, and accordingly on March 23, 1649, Miles Standish, Samuel Nash and Constant Southworth were appointed by the Colonial Court to consummate the purchase from the Indians.

They bought of Ousamequin also known as Massasoit,

> "a tract of land usually called Saughtuckett, extending in the length and breadth thereof as followeth, that is to say, from the wear on Saughtuckett River seven miles due East, and from the said wear seven miles due West, and from the said wear seven miles due North, and from the said wear seven miles due South."

This purchase was consummated on Sachem's Rock, which lies on the East bank of the Satucket River, a few hundred yards South of Plymouth Street, on land now owned by Henry L. Moorhouse.

While this Grant from the Court limited the purchase to eight miles square, the purchase from the Indians was fourteen miles square. The reason of this difference is not very obvious, but probably the purchase was made thus extensive with a view to additional contemplated Grants, or perhaps to give themselves room to locate their four miles North, South, East and West more advantageously, as they had the expressed privilege of setting up their centre wherever they should deem it most conducive to their interest.

Sachem's Rock, the Indian name for which was Wonnocoote was known locally for many years as "Cootah Hill."

The price paid by Standish and the others, to the Indians for the land consisted of 7 coats, a yard and a half of cloth in each coat, 9 hatchets, 8 hoes, 20 knives, 4 moose skins, and 10½ yards of cotton.

This portion of land afterwards became known as Bridgewater and consisted of what is now Bridgewater, East Bridgewater, West Bridgewater and North Bridgewater now Brockton. It also included a large part of what is now Hanson and a small part of Abington.

It will be remembered that the Court in granting the right to purchase this land extended the privilege of changing the territorial centre by relocating it "whereever they should deem it conducive to their interest." Accordingly, eleven years after the purchase was consummated on Sachem's Rock, the centre of the territory, which then included all the Bridgewaters, was located at a small white oak tree, afterwards know as Centre Tree. This tree stood on the South side of the road a few feet West of the railroad crossing at Westdale, in the Town of what is now West Bridgewater. A stone now marks its location.

In 1688 the Court granted two additional miles, North, South, East and West, "provided the Grants of land formerly made by the Court be not molested."

Capt. Miles Standish, Messrs. John Alden, George Soule, Constant Southworth, John Rogers and Wm. Brett were appointed to lay out and divide said lands among the inhabitants. Said inhabitants confirmed this division by an agreement themselves and were denominated "original proprietors."

These proprietors were 54 in number and owned one share each. To these 54 shares there were subsequently added two more.

The Town of East Bridgewater, the original territorial centre of Bridgewater at the time of the purchase of Bridgewater from the Indians, was settled about 1660, Incorporated as a Parish in 1723, and as a Town June 14, 1823. The first Town Meeting was held July 4th, 1823, with Nahum Mitchell as Moderator.

In 1660 Samuel Allen, Jr., settled on the East side of the Matfield River, near the bridge of the Bridgewater Branch Railroad, where is now located the plant of the Edison Electric Illuminating Co. He was therefore, the first settler in what is now East Bridgewater. Allen's land included that in the centre village, the two central burial-grounds, the Common, and what is known as the Plain.

In 1662 Nicholas Byram arrived from Weymouth and settled on the West bank of the Snell Meadow Brook, South of North Central street, near the present home of Peter Gregoire. He had five of the original 56 shares and his was the only house not burned by the Indians during King Philip's War, because he had given the Indians cider.

The third settler was Thomas Whitman who first had his house near the junction of Bedford and Whitman streets in Elmwood. This house was burned by the Indians, and his next house was built in the rear of the Clark Swallow place on Whitman street, now occupied by Miss Charlotte Newton.

The fourth settler was Robert Latham who came in

1663 from Marshfield. He located near the weir on the Satucket River, and on April 9th, 1676, his house was burned by the Indians. There were in all nine houses burned in East Bridgewater as a result of the Indian War. It is a tradition that within recent years the front door of the Washburn house located on the North side of West street and West of Spring street showed the marks of Indian hatchets.

Relics of Indian hand-craft have from time to time been found while plowing the land. Arrow heads, axes, hatchets, mortars and pestles have been found near Robins Pond, also on Wonnocoote Hill where the deed of land sold by the Indians was signed and particularly on land along the rivers. On the North bank of Snell Meadow Brook there appears to have been an especial place for the manufacture of Indian implements. Near Robins Pond is a small hill which was once the general burial-ground of the natives here, but skeletons of Indians have occasionally been exhumed in other parts of the Town.

The Satucket river marked the Northernmost bound of the Wampanoags, a powerful tribe, of which Massasoit was chief. Their territory was bounded on the West by the Narragansetts, on the North by the Nipmucks and extended through allied tribes to the tip of the Cape.

One of the Indian Trails crossed the river a short distance up-stream from Sachem's Rock. The stepping-stones where the Indians following this Trail fording Satucket River, can now be seen at low water. The herring weir, which was built by the Indians was situated near this ford and is still visible when the water is low.

The Trail ran up-hill to the West of the residence of Mrs. Charles Spear, across Central Street, went along a ridge by Church Road, across Union Street and the Whitman Meadow, and went on in the direction of Weymouth and Boston.

That part of this Trail now known as Church Street, is probably the oldest public Street in East Bridgewater. It is now seldom used.

The last marriage of Indians took place in 1830 and was performed in the Ezra Alden house on Elm Street. Isaac Wood married Lucy Sepet. The last Indian in East Bridgewater died in 1843.

King Philip's War brought great distress upon the people here but soon after King Philip's death, which occurred August 12, 1676, the tide of affairs began to turn, new houses were erected and money was contributed by friends in Ireland to aid the distressed Colonists.

Immigrants from various places soon began to settle here. Experience Mitchell, one of the passengers in the third ship "The Ann," who had resided in Duxbury several years, came to East Bridgewater about 1680 and with his son, Edward Mitchell, built a house in what was then known as Joppa, now Elmwood.

The first Post Office was established in 1799 in the East Parish, now East Bridgewater. This was called the Bridgewater Post Office. Judge Nahum Mitchell was the Postmaster. It was in Judge Mitchell's law office. Prior to 1799 there were but four Post Offices in Plymouth County and only 639 in the United States. The mail was brought from Boston once a week by horse-back. Prior to the opening of the local office people went to Weymouth for their letters. In November, 1831, the name of the local office was changed to East Bridgewater Post Office.

The Cemetery on Central Street is supposed to be the second oldest in this locality, the one in West Bridgewater being older. Rev. John Angier, the first minister in East Bridgewater, cut the initials and dates on some of the grave stones. The oldest date in the cemetery is 1685. "Latham's Epitaphs in Old Bridgewater" gives a number of interesting inscriptions.

At one time a cemetery was started on the old High School lot and certain bodies and stones were later removed to the Central Cemetery.

The first church in East Bridgewater, Unitarian, was established October 28th, 1724. Rev. John Angier was the minister and his salary was paid by the Precinct. For sixty years the people had worshipped in the old Meeting House in West Bridgewater. The first church building was raised March 15th, 1721, on land of Samuel Allen, son of the Samuel Allen who was the first settler in East Bridgewater. The Indians had the privilege of making their pews under the stairs.

The second church building was built a few feet East of the first church. Pews in the second church were sold to raise money to send the last contingent of Revolutionary troops in 1781, some thirteen men.

The third church building, now standing, was built in 1794. It originally was broad side to the street, had three galleries, and a raised pulpit with a sounding board. In 1850 it was turned quarter around and remodeled, which the present generation profoundly regrets. In the belfry of the Unitarian church hangs a genuine Paul Revere bell, bearing his name and the date 1724. It is authentic, as in a list of the bells cast by Paul Revere now in the hands of his descendants, reference to this bell appears.

The East Bridgewater Society of the New Jerusalem Church in Elmwood was organized in 1830. The present church was built in 1854. A steel bell was put in in 1864, weighing five hundred and eighty pounds and costing one hundred and seventy-four dollars.

In 1834 Lewis Keith and others formed a Universalist Society, which held services occasionally in the hall in the upper part of Mr. Keith's dwelling house. Part of this house still stands. It is the second house East of the Unitarian Church. In 1851 they erected a House of Worship on the site where the Crombie Tavern

previously stood, near the site of the present Public Library. In 1857 this church building was leased to the Methodists and the Universalist Society was disbanded.

The Methodist Protestant Church was organized in 1842. In 1844 the church meetings were held in the Satucket school house. This society disbanded a few years later, but another Society, the Methodist Episcopal Church, was formed and their first church building was located in Northville. In 1857 this Society was disorganized, another Methodist Society having been formed in the center which had hired the church formerly used by the Universalists.

In 1826 the Union Trinitarian Society was formed. Their first church building was burned in 1844 and the building now in use by them was immediately erected, presumably on the same site. Mr. Baalis Sanford was Pastor. He was dismissed in 1849 and later formed the Trinitarian Congregational Society. In 1851 this organization erected a church on North Central Street on the North side near Elm Street. It was fifty-six feet long, had fifty-six pews and a bell that weighed ten hundred and ninety-four pounds. In 1861 the Society was dissolved and in 1865 the church building was moved to Brockton and used as a shoe factory.

The first Roman Catholic Church in East Bridgewater was gathered in 1862. The Church built by the Universalists, later used by the Methodists, was sold to the Catholics in 1863. That Church burned in the 90's and the present Church was erected on land East of the Town Hall.

In 1775 troops from Bridgewater were sent to the Hudson River during the French War; on this occasion "Yankee Doodle" was sung for the first time. The Captain "Goodin'" mentioned in "Yankee Doodle" was once stationed in Halifax.

Men from East Bridgewater have taken part in the

Indian Wars, French-Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican, Spanish War, Civil and World Wars. An excellent account of the activities of East Bridgewater men during the Civil War is contained in the History of the Twenty-ninth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, written by the late William H. Osborne.

When our ancestors settled Massachusetts they brought English money which was used for a while but proving inadequate they adopted the Beaver, Wampum or Shell Money of the Indians. In 1635 the Civil Authorities ordered that farthings be laid aside and that bullets be a substitute for them, at one for one. This was done in order to keep a needed supply of one sort of defensive material among the immigrants, who were exposed to sudden attacks from the natives. In 1652 the General Court established a mint for silver coins. They had the likeness of a pine tree (long a favorite emblem of perpetuity and truth with them) impressed on one side of such currency. The first pieces were three-pence, sixpence and twelve-pence and ten years afterwards twopenny ones were made. For the purpose of retaining this money at home our authorities had it made with about one-fourth more alloy than similar pieces of England. This was the origin of our New England currency and the discontinuance of English money in the country.

A Bank called the East Bridgewater Bank was chartered in 1828. It was located in the building now occupied by Ezra S. Whitmarsh. This building was designed to accommodate the Bank and the family of the cashier. This Bank closed after a few years as a result of speculation in Eastern Lands.

The East Bridgewater Savings Bank was incorporated March 8th, 1870; $596.00 were deposited the first business month. The assets now are $8,076,649.80.

The East Bridgewater Co-operative Bank was incor-

porated in 1913, and its deposits now exceed a half-million dollars.

The first Library was established in 1770 and was known as the Library of the East Parish. On February 28th, 1793, a Library Society was formed under the name of "The Proprietors of a Library in the East Precinct of Bridgewater." In 1836 there was a Social Library in Joppa, now Elmwood. In 1838 there was a Village Library in the office of Welcome Young, a lawyer of that day. On September 23rd, 1870, the East Bridgewater Library Association was formed and a committee chosen consisting of Ezra Kingman, George W. Allen and Isaac N. Nutter. On March 12th, 1883, they offered the books to the Town and the Town appropriated five hundred dollars for three hundred books. In 1929 this library, now known as the East Bridgewater Public Library, contained 12,794 usable books. The present library building was the gift of Mr. Cyrus Washburn, a former resident of the town.

There are in East Bridgewater twenty-two sites of mills which were run by water power. The first mill of any description was a saw mill built and owned by Robert Latham in 1667. It was situated on the Satucket River a little below the Indian Weir. In 1700 there was a saw mill built by John Whitman on the Snell Meadow Brook, which runs under Water street, through Forge Pond, under North Central street and Union street and then joins the Matfield River. The mill was a few rods north from the Water street bridge. Later the mill-site was over-flowed by the Forge Pond, Capt. Jonathan Bass having built a dam and a forge farther down the stream on the land which he had bought of Josiah Byram in 1726. The location of the mill built by Jonathan Bass is now spoken of as "the old Forge."

A grist mill was built by Joseph Shaw at Shaw's Corner, in 1700. About 1740 Hugh Orr, who immigrat-

ed from Scotland, started the manufacture of scythes, muskets, etc., in a factory near his home at the corner of North Central and Pleasant streets. His house, later known as the Vinton House, was raised August 4th, 1742 and up to a few years ago was inhabited by William Vinton, the oldest man in Town at that time, a lineal descendant.

It is recorded that Hugh Orr made five hundred muskets for the Colonists, and at the time of the Revolution made cannon. He was the first man to make them from a solid casting, bored out.

Near the dam on Satucket River nails and tacks were made for many years by David Kingman, Zebina Keith and Mr. Keith's sons. In 1892 their factory was burned in the big fire which also destroyed all of the buildings then in use by the Carver Cotton Gin Co.

About 1788 Samuel Rogers established a machine shop near what is now the brick store occupied by George A. Root, between Central and Bedford streets. Soon after beginning business for himself he began the study of a nail machine. He was so successful that he eventually made a machine which would cut and head a nail at one operation. This is supposed to be the first machine of its kind in America and probably in the World. When the nail factory in Plymouth was established in 1806, the machines were all made by Mr. Rogers. In 1802 he made two silver watches, supposed to be the first made in America, one of which is still preserved in the Rogers family.

In 1822 Samuel Keene operated a mill on the Matfield river, in Elmwood, a short distance up-stream from the Bedford street bridge, and made shoe machinery. Mr. Keene also made in this factory the first clothes wringer having rubber-rolls, now so universally used.

There was a tannery located in Joppa, now Elmwood, as early as 1700 on the estate of Ensign Edward Mitchell. One of the stones used in the tannery can

now be seen near the Fire Station in Elmwood.

Josiah Whitman living on Whitman Street, who died in 1754, extensively engaged in the manufacture of shoes. This was probably the first attempt to manufacture shoes more extensively than by the ordinary mode of furnishing custom work.

The first building constructed in East Bridgewater for the manufacture of shoes on a large scale was built in Joppa in 1829 by Cushing Mitchell and Seth Bryant. In later years Mr. Bryant conducted the business alone. During the War of the Rebellion he supplied the Union Army with about three hundred thousand pairs of shoes. Wanting more room he built an addition to the back of the "Brick Store," now used by Mr. Root. He employed a number of men cutting shoes which were put out to be made in fifty pair lots by men in adjacent towns. This was considered headquarters in Plymouth County for the manufacture of shoes. Mr. Bezaleel Allen made the first pegged shoes. They were made for Southern trade and were known as "Nigger Shoes."

In 1828 Nathaniel Wheeler, Wallace Rust and Allen Whitman were incorporated as the East Bridgewater Manufacturing Co., for the purpose of manufacturing cotton goods. In 1843 a new Company bought the privilege and began the manufacture of cotton gins. They were Eleazer Carver, Caleb S. Hunt, Franklin Dexter, Caleb Reed, John Reed and Sampson Reed, who were incorporated as the E. Carver Co., afterwards known as the Carver Cotton Gin Co.

In 1835 the Keith Iron Company, was established at what was later the Rogers and Sheldon Plant, South of Union street.

Among the many articles manufactured in this Town were tack machines, shoe machinery, brass pins, boards and shingles, doors, sashes, blinds, cotton and woolen goods, cast-steel shovels and hoes. Locomotive engines were built here in 1851. The inventor of the

present twist drill for boring holes in metal and now in use in all manufacturing centers of the World, was Mr. Samuel A. Morse then a resident of East Bridgewater where he manufactured these drills in 1857.

Late in the 18th century a brick kiln stood opposite the house now occupied by Mr. Charles F. Mann. The old "Brick Store," now standing, built in 1806, was made of bricks manufactured there.

The first tavern in East Bridgewater was kept, about 1711, by Josiah Sears in the Isaac Harris house in Satucket. This house was not far from the old fording place on Satucket River. It was quite recently destroyed. From 1760 to 1772 Joshua Pratt kept a tavern on the North side of Central street, opposite Bridge street. Benjamin Harris kept a tavern, built in 1787, in what is now known as the Bennett house near the pond in Satucket. Nathaniel Chamberlain kept a tavern in 1790 in a house near Byram's plain. The Joseph Lazell tavern was built about 1796 near the site of the present Public Library. This was afterwards run by Mrs. Naomi Crombie and became known as the Crombie Tavern. The Hudson House was built in 1787. It was located near the house now occupied by Dr. Bannerman and was burned in 1857.

The Satucket River flows through the south-easterly part of the Town, originating in the North-east part of Halifax and flowing through Monponsett and the bed of Stump Pond. It is joined in East Bridgewater by Poor Meadow River and Black Brook.

The Matfield River has its rise in Stoughton as the Salisbury Brook and passing through Brockton, enters East Bridgewater on the West Border. Beaver Brook, which has its rise in Holbrook, flows through the Easterly part of Brockton and enters East Bridgewater on the Northern border. It joins the Matfield River a short distance North of the bridge at North Central Street.

Snell Meadow Brook rises in Abington, flows through Whitman and enters East Bridgewater on the North side. Herring were numerous in Satucket River and shad in Matfield River. There was a shad weir on the Matfield River near where the Edison Electric Illuminating Plant now stands.

There was no school in East Bridgewater until 1720. The first school house stood near the West end of the Common and within the last thirty or forty years the traces of its location could still be seen. There was only one school house until about 1771. In 1773 East Bridgewater was divided into seven school districts. In 1796 the total expense of maintaining schools in East Bridgewater was $332.89 and was paid from the Town Treasury. In 1929 there was an average attendance of 785 pupils and an expenditure of $64,877.78.

In 1818 what was known as The Bridgewater Academy stood a short distance back of the tree still standing on the lawn of the J. Ralph Baker place on Central street, to the West of the old cemetery. It was first a school for young ladies and was incorporated in 1837. In 1845 it was sold to William Allen, and used afterwards as a private school. The original building is now standing on Keith Place, in practically the same condition as it used to be, so far as the outside is concerned.

The East Bridgewater High School was established in 1860 and the first, eighth and ninth school districts were united. The first teacher was Horace Cannon.

The first general store in town was located in Harmony on what is now Grove Street and was started in 1745.

At that time the route from East Bridgewater Center to Boston included Union Street, Water Street, Grove Street and Harvard Street.

The Turnpike, now known as Bedford Street, was built as a private enterprise, chartered in 1804 and com-

pleted in 1806. One of the toll-gates was in Joppa and Mr. Josiah Edson was toll-keeper. The toll rates were as follows: "For every coach, phaeton, chariot, or other four wheel carriage, for the conveyance of persons, drawn by two horses, twenty-five cents, and if drawn by more than two horses, an additional sum of four cents for each horse; for every cart, waggon, sleigh or sled, or other carriage of burthen, drawn by two oxen or horses, twelve and one-half cents, and if by more than two, an additional sum of three cents for every such ox or horse; for every curricle, sixteen cents; for every sleigh for the conveyance of passengers, drawn by two horses, twelve and one-half cents, and if drawn by more than two, an additional sum of three cents for each horse; for every sleigh or sled drawn by one horse, ten cents; for every chaise, chair, or other carriage drawn by one horse, twelve and one-half cents; for every man and horse, five cents; for all horses, oxen and neat cattle, led or driven, besides those in teams and carriages, one cent each; for all sheep and swine, three cents by the dozen, and in the same proportion for a greater or less number."

By the 1930 Census East Bridgewater is credited with a population of Three Thousand Five Hundred and Ninety-one. The Assessors' valuation of the Real and Personal property of its inhabitants was then Four Million Six Hundred and Sixty-six Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-six Dollars.